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TIMELY FARM TOPICS No. 46a
(Farm Science Serves the Nation No. 25)

WHAT'S NEW IN TURKEYS

A transcribed talk by Stanley J. Marsden, Poultry Husbandman, Bureau of Animal Industry, U. S. Department of Agriculture. Recorded October 25, 1945. Time, without announcer's parts, 5 minutes and 30 seconds.

ANNOUNCER'S OPENING AND CLOSING

OPENING

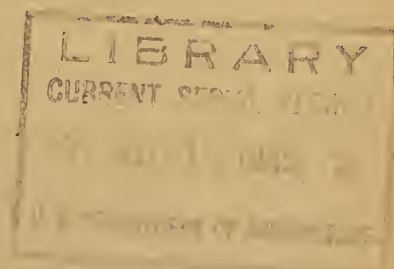
ANNOUNCER: (LIVE) And now let's hear how "Farm Science Serves the Nation" -- with better and smaller turkeys. Yes sir, I do mean smaller! Of course the folks who want 30-pounders can still have 'em -- but it won't be long before the small-size family can have a small-size turkey...with more meat on the drumstick and wishbone...and not so much neck!

To learn what science is doing...to improve the turkey...we'll hear by transcription from Uncle Sam's top turkey scientist -- Stanley J. Marsden, of the United States Department of Agriculture. Mr. Marsden:

CLOSING

ANNOUNCER: (LIVE) You've heard Stanley J. Marsden of the U. S. Department of Agriculture report on what's new in turkey raising. This talk is one of a series sponsored by the Department's Agricultural Research Administration, telling how Farm Science Serves the Nation.

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STANLEY MARSDEN:

As everyone knows, the turkey was here in the New World long before the Pilgrims celebrated the first Thanksgiving. Why, then -- has it taken so long to make this noble bird more efficient and more useful?

One reason is the fact that turkeys are extremely susceptible to certain diseases. Before the scientists could go to work on a program for breeding better turkeys, they had to get the health problem in hand so farmers could raise turkeys without heavy losses.

With the health problem under control, the next step was to develop turkeys that would satisfy the most exacting taste...a small plump bird for the average family...a larger bird for the hotel and restaurant trade. And thanks to scientific breeding, these turkeys have broader breasts, plumper legs, and -- I'm glad to report -- they have less neck!

Some of you may already be acquainted with the "Beltsville Small White" turkey developed at the Department's Research Center at Beltsville, Maryland. This bird has rather short legs, an abbreviated neck, and plenty of breast meat. It is breeding true to type, more than meeting early expectations, and is well started in commercial channels.

In the meantime there's a wide range of size, for most breeders continue to raise such breeds as the Bronze and White Holland. A mature tom turkey of one of those breeds weighs upwards of 30 pounds dressed weight when ready for market, and that's about three or four times the weight of a young hen turkey of the small type.

Now a few years ago, in order to put turkey raising on a still better basis, people interested in turkeys brought their problems to the Department of Agriculture, and that was the beginning of the National Turkey Improvement Plan.

Thirty-two States are now cooperating in this Plan. It provides first for the classification of breeding stock according to quality, and second for the control of pullorum disease. Only persons taking part in the Plan can use its trademarks and official emblem in their advertising.

Some of the breeders are now producing a large-type turkey with lots of meat on the breast and legs -- a type known as "broad-breasted."

As the name implies, this bird has a very broad breast with plenty of meat. Just how much meat is pretty important to the consumer. So to have the term "broad-breasted" really mean what it says, it can be used only for a turkey that has a breast at least 3-1/2 inches wide, measured at a point 1-3/4 inches above the keel or breast bone.

Now a few more highlights. Most turkeys, like their wild ancestors, still lay only a few eggs -- in the warm months of spring. The eggs take four weeks to hatch, and by the time the young turkeys are ready for market, it's late November or even December.

But here's where science is stepping in. By selective breeding, we have developed a few turkey hens that lay more than 200 eggs a year. That's four or five times the usual number.

Although only a few turkey hens reach the 200-egg mark, some commercial breeders have good-laying stock, which means an extension of the normal season. With artificial incubation and proper feeding and care, you have a good supply of fresh turkeys practically the year around.

Another new development is the shipment of turkey hatching eggs by airplane. Last spring we shipped eggs to an agricultural college in England, which reported an 87 percent hatch.

Another thing -- scientists have proved that turkeys stay healthier if they're separated from other poultry, and more and more growers are using this knowledge. Turkeys, chickens, waterfowl -- in fact, all kinds of poultry do better when they're raised with their own kind.

Now what do all these things add up to? Do they put more and better turkeys on the market -- not only during the holidays -- but whenever we want them?

Let's hear from the economists of the Department, who study market trends. According to the market folks, more early turkeys are being produced and there's an increased year-round demand.

They also report a wider use of science in turkey raising -- which permits growing the birds in larger flocks -- and more and more farmers are raising poults on wire-mesh floors during the first seven or eight weeks, to keep parasites under control.

Finally, this year's crop of turkeys will be the largest ever raised and marketed in the United States, and one reason for this is the great number of turkeys raised from hatchery poults.

Now what's ahead in turkey raising? In brief -- better birds raised at less cost.

Through better breeding and feeding, the turkey raiser can save a month in the time required to grow prime turkeys of any desired weight. By keeping records he can make selections on the basis of egg production, fertility, hatchability, livability, and rate of maturity. These are things that make for real progress.

And there's no magic about it. Just the methodical discovery, step by step, of new and better ways to make the great American bird more efficient -- and more useful to everybody.